THE BUSHRANGING DAYS

A Seamy Side of Our History

[By Hon. T. L. WILLIAMS]

(Read to a meeting of the Society on 18 April 1968.)

Much of what I am going to deal with in my talk is not by any means new. Perhaps it is being presented in a different way instead.

I have endeavoured to group together—in proper sequence and order—the various incidents and happenings associated with those bushranging days in Australia in such a way as to make an address both interesting and informative. It was no easy matter, but many references to historical records of those now far-off days have been of great assistance and value.

One has only to ponder for a few brief moments to be satisfied that Australia—the new land "down under," as it was familiarly known then—in its early bid between the early 1800's to the late '80's of last century to build up an attractive image of itself in the eyes of the outside world, was largely nullified in those years which covered the three unfortunate eras of bushranging outbreaks within its borders.

The young country's bright prospects and brighter future during those eventful and unfortunate years was not only debased but defaced to a considerable degree by these unsavoury happenings.

I trust that I have selected a subject which will prove as interesting to you as it always has been to me—for one reason or another. Happenings of the past are in themselves a history of the past and the happenings of today and tomorrow will in turn become the history of today and of the future.

The story, necessarily abbreviated, of the individuals comprising our bushranging outlaws, the many happenings—both humorous and tragic alike—and the many incidents connected with these men and their lives—which of course they held in the "hollow of their hands" at most times—is part of our country's past history—even if an unsavoury and unfortunate record.

It will be quickly noticeable how distinct my talk will be from that delivered three weeks ago by Dr. Drury Clarke, who spoke of men and their families who were in a great

measure "empire builders"—such men as Mr. Justice Chubb, Sir Arthur Lilley, Sir Samuel Griffith, Judges Real, Macrossan and many others, together with Sir Thomas McIlwraith and others of their time and day.

The names of the men whom I must quote are the very antithesis of the men quoted by Dr. Clarke—men who were entirely foreign to law and order and who were empire-breakers and despoilers, as well as defamers, of the country and far removed from being empire-builders of their time and age.

I believe that the great majority of these men were "victims of circumstances." Their many crimes and misdeeds were their protest against society as it was then.

The social order was all "out of gear," and these men seemed to have been brought into its turning wheel, with no thought of the ultimate result that was the punishment for their misdeeds.

Many of the happenings of those days—for example, the trouble at the Eureka Stockade, in the goldfield outskirts of Ballarat in 1854—had nothing to do with the bushranging activities of those years.

THE EUREKA STOCKADE

The Eureka Stockade was a clash between 200 police troopers and soldiers and a handful of 50 miners and prospectors, which resulted in the deaths of no fewer than 30 people all told, in a matter of barely fifteen minutes' fighting! The miners, though regarded as being outside the law and ill-advised, were without doubt the victims of bad legislation and an authority stupidly exercised. That about sums it up concisely.

To return to the bushranging era, extending from the 1840's to the late '80's and beyond of last century, bushrangers became a menace to law and order and to early-day settlers in at least three of our Southern States, particularly Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania, from the early 1840's to the mid and late '80's of last century, at least. These bushrangers were men from all walks of life, practically driven to a life of crime, for many and varied reasons. Others took on a bushranging life mainly because they were really "bad eggs" in their community, dating back in ancestry to the convict settlements, which were established in many parts of the country years earlier—mostly in Tasmania and the eastern States.

Convicts, escaping from chain gangs or prison cells, sought refuge in bush and mountain hide-outs, looting, plundering, waylaying and even callously murdering unsuspecting

victims of their attacks, by day as well as night. Clashes with patrolling police were frequent and many officers of the law suffered severely at the hands of these "bushranging criminals" as one writer of those now far-off days described them.

In the preparation of material for a talk such as this, one has to rely a good deal on the already-recorded history of our bushrangers and their activities, with frequent reference to such publications which over the years have devoted their pages to a compilation of historical records of such. One of these books bears the title: *"Plundering Sons"*; it is profusely illustrated and full of facts concerning these days. Its writers are three well-known Australians, the number including "Bill" Wannan of *Australian Post* fame in recent years.

Many tales have been told and written concerning the deeds of the more-outstanding of our bushranging fraternity. Some are highly imaginative and can be discounted for this reason. Many "tall tales" were told around camp-fires, in shearing sheds and the like over the years.

Not all these bushrangers were criminals in the strict sense of the word. Many claimed they were driven to performing the recorded misdeeds by the turbulence of the hard times prevailing, and because of the injustices heaped upon them by society. Others joined gangs seemingly for the pure love of adventure.

Singularly enough, Queensland in the pioneering age seems to have escaped the stigma of being a "bushrangers' paradise" in those disturbing years, despite the fact that bushranging seemed to be at its best—or worst—about the time we were being granted separation from New South Wales in 1859, now almost 110 years ago. It was the sudden discovery of gold in Victoria and the southern corners of New South Wales that seemed to "trigger off" the whole business mostly. The necessity to transfer overland by road the gold being won and as the only means then available for its transportation from the various fields was by stage and mail-coach, the poor protection available and the ease with which the "diggers"—mostly hordes of Chinese—could be held up at gun-point and robbed, were no doubt additional factors.

We certainly had the outlaw activities of the Kenniff Bros., and the murders at Hornet Bank station, out from Taroom, in the Upper Dawson area, when most of the members of the Frazer family were massacred during an attack by local aborigines. But bushrangers cannot be blamed for these. We did, however, have our "Wild Scotsman" who stole fast-moving, well-bred station horses from various properties in the Dalby, Nanango, Gayndah and Gin Gin districts, held up

road mailmen, riffling through the bags of mail matter in search of packages of gold being forwarded to the nearest Mining Warden's office and any registered mail. He would then stage a quick get-away to another area, until Time and mounted police finally caught up with him. But that is another story in itself.

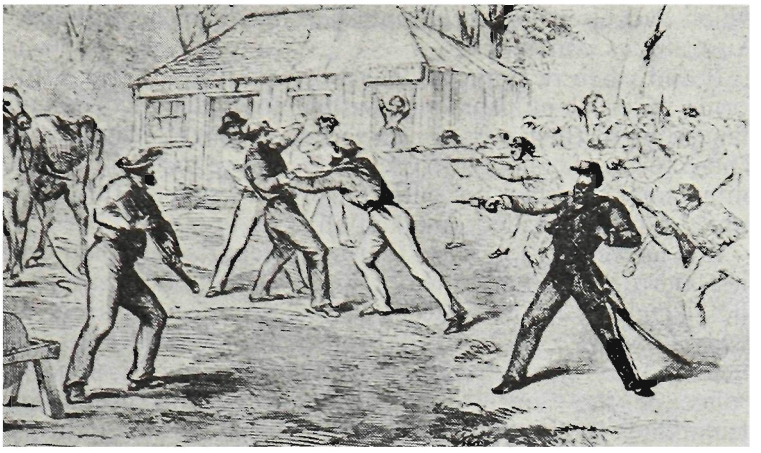
OUTLAWS YOUNG MEN

It is a remarkable fact that our Australian bushrangers were comparatively young men (differing in this respect from the highwaymen of the British Isles and the bandits of Italy, Spain and Mexico). Andrew George Scott ("Captain Moonlite") was only 37 at the time of his hanging, followed by Frank McCallum (known as "Capt. Melville"), 36, found dead in his cell and believed to have been put to death by his prison warders. Then followed "Mad Dan" Morgan (35), shot by police in a chase, Fred. Ward ("Capt. Thunderbolt"), 34, and John Lynch, who at 29 was hanged for his many crimes.

Ned Kelly was actually only 25 on the day he was hanged. His brother Dan was 19; Steve Hart, 21; Joe Byrne, 23; Ben Hall, 27; Johnny Gilbert, 25; "Bold Jack" Donahoe, 22; "Jacky Jacky" Westwood, 26; Matt. Brady, 27; Fred Lowry, 27. The brothers Tom and John Clarke were 26 and 24 respectively, at the date of their hangings.

Authentic records of the time show that Martin Cash, Frank (or "Darkie") Gardiner and Harry Power among them served long, hard terms in prison, instead of going to the gallows. Historians tell us that all but one of the long list of bushrangers died poor. The exception was "Darkie" Gardiner, who after his release bought a saloon in San Francisco (U.S.A.) and subsequently met his death in a violent street brawl. Steve Hart on one occasion remarked: "The life of a bushranger is a short but a merry one!" His final judgment of life and himself—after he had left his farm to join forces with the notorious Kelly gang—proved it to be no life at all, short or long!

Incidentally, it is not very well known that in the 1860's, Frank ("Darkie") Gardiner roamed a fair bit of outback Queensland, chiefly around the Miles-Taroom district, at "Hell Hole" Creek. Legend has it that he had several "plants" of stolen money. On the dodge from the Southern police, after the hold-up of the Eugowra coach, Gardiner found his way later to the Rockhampton area, around the Styx River. He was accompanied by his pseudo-wife, who finally gave his whereabouts away by breaking a long-standing rule not to write her friends in Victoria and southern



CAPTURE OF FRANK GARDINER.
Mitchell Library Print.

New South Wales. Gardiner was run to earth and taken back South again, did a long term of imprisonment, and when released found his way to America, where at San Francisco he "founded" a gambling "joint," and was finally murdered in a gambling brawl.

Records show that many years later his relatives (sons and/or nephews) visited the Taroom and Miles area, in search of alleged wealth left hidden by Gardiner, but with what success was never really made known.

THREE BUSHRANGING TYPES

Our bushranging days might be placed under three distinct headings: "The Bolters," "The Wild Colonial Boys" and the honest-to-God, dyed in the wool "outlaws," the Kelly gang (comprising Ned and Dan Kelly, Ben Hall, Steve Hart, Joe Byrne, and "Mad Dan" Morgan). Capt. Fred Ward (known as "Thunderbolt"), Andrew George Scott (known as "Capt. Moonlite"), Johnny Gilbert, Frank McCallum, Johnny Lynch and several others of more or less outstanding repute.

These three eras take us through to the mid-eighties (and even later) of last century. As their name implies, "The Bolters" comprised those who absconded from various prison and convict camps, rather than submit any longer to the cruel discipline and harsh treatment meted out to them there. Some of these absconders tried to make a living off the land; others robbed free settlers when desperate for food or clothing. The others simply carried on their old life of crime,

which had elsewhere been cut short by their deportation to Australia as convicts.

If and when recaptured, they were subjected to the utmost forms of cruel punishment possible to imagine. The more dangerous of them were given terms of solitary confinement. Those fortunate enough to escape recapture mostly embarked on a career of crime not entirely foreign to them, fully determined not to be killed or taken alive!

It is interesting to record that when reports of prison cruelties later on became known, it supplied the main reasons for the "ganging" up of the Kellys (under the leadership of Ned Kelly himself). He and his brother Dan voiced their complete disgust in a letter to the Victorian Commissioner for Police of the time, "deploring such wanton cruelty and demanding its immediate discontinuance." Failing this, his own full measure of retaliation would be exercised to the limit, at every opportunity that might present itself in the future, he wrote.

Of course this letter was never acknowledged, and to this day it exists on the files of the Victorian Police Department, with no copy of any reply or account of any action taken or recommended attached thereto.

From that time onwards, the Kellys and their associates became "marked men" in the eyes of the Victorian and southern New South Wales police. Trumped-up stories were brought in by troopers in particular, claiming that the Kellys' home was being used for sly-grog-selling to local settlers, station owners and the travelling public, and that the daughters were prostitutes. In short, anything vile that could be laid at the family's door found quick favour with the police—whether it could be substantiated or not.

Ned Kelly was particularly devoted to his mother and sisters and these lying reports embittered him severely. He and his brother Dan renewed their threats to "get even with the police and society in general," and take such action as they best thought fit, in their own way and time. Most of us know the ultimate outcome of things—what happened shortly afterwards during the day and night of 28 June 1880, at the Glenrowan Hotel. The gang was practically wiped out, Ned Kelly himself, complete in protective armour and saucepan-shaped iron headgear, being captured and subsequently hanged at the old Melbourne Gaol on 11 November 1880, five months after his capture at the Glenrowan Hotel.

His proud but distressed mother exhorted him to be brave and to "die like a man and like a Kelly," which he did.

He had remained proud to the last. On the previous day, he took great pains with his attire and toilet, stating that he

wanted his family to have a good likeness of him and added he did not want to be pictured or remembered as a condemned prisoner or as a bedraggled outlaw, claiming he had never been that way, anyhow!

The whole sorry story savours of Irish hostility to English authority, in the new land "down under." Sympathy was widespread for the younger of the convicts and the absconders from prison control.

In the eyes of a great number of people—then and now—Ned Kelly, as but one of the long list of bushrangers, only took to this form of life through being wronged himself, persecuted and hounded down. In what is now familiarly known even to this day as "The Kelly Country"—in and around the field of their activities—many people regard him as "a hero as well as a notorious outlaw," a hardened criminal without fear (yet neither chivalrous nor brave beyond a certain point)!

The many and varied deeds of Ned Kelly and his gang gave Australian writers a golden opportunity of characterising, in prose and verse, such deeds and writers of the day—and since—took and have taken full advantage of the opportunities offered them. All were able to portray in a variety of books these segments of Australian history—such books as *"Robbery Under Arms," "For the Term of His Natural Life"* and so on, familiar to many of us in our youthful days, at least.

Briefly, the Kellys of a century ago appear to have made almost as many friends as enemies, down through the years that have passed since those "hectic days" of the past in this country.

One has to cover a lot of wild territory of those days, in order to reach the scenes of most of their activities and hide-outs, stretching from Macquarie Harbour, known to convict inmates as "Hell's Gates," to Norfolk Island, with its "Murderers' Death Mound"; to Port Arthur, Ballarat, Benalla and Lambing Flat (now the flourishing town of Young); to the Weddin, Wombat and Strathbogie ranges; to Junee, Wantabadgery and Wangaratta; to Carcoar, Forbes, Canowindra, Binalong, Eugowra Rocks; to Glenrowan, Jerilderie, Euroa across the Lachlan Plains; to Mudgee, Greta, Hill End—to quote but a few of the many towns in which the bushrangers operated in the southern areas of New South Wales and northern Victoria in particular. One must, of course, not forget to mention Stringybark Creek, either.

This was a vast, wild territory mostly, comprising bush, mountain ranges and well-watered streams, offering good hide-outs and in essence the ideal setting for their activities.

Apart from the Kelly gang there were scores of others in those lawless years — and even before that — equally as notorious, as spectacular and unflinching in the face of certain capture and death as the Kellys were. One writer refers to the 1860's (before the Kelly days) as the "Vintage Years" of the bushrangers.

Many of these names will be familiar to readers of Australia's early-day history, figuring as they do in the bushrangers' long list: Ben Hall, Steve Hart, Joe Byrne, Frank ("Darkie") Gardiner, Fred. Ward (known as "Thunderbolt"), Andrew Scott (the parson of the Bacchus Marsh area in Victoria and known as "Capt. Moonlite"), Johnny Gilbert (Ben Hall's favourite partner of the 1863-64 period), Jack O'Meally, Johnny Dunn, "Bold Jack" Donahoe, Bill ("Jacky Jacky") Westwood, "Mad Dan" Morgan, Matt. Brady, Tom and John Clarke, John Lynch, Fred. Lowry, Martin Cash, Harry Power (alias Johnson), Jack Bradshaw, Paddy Galvin, John ("Black") Caesar (a West-Indian deported convict), Johnny Dunn, Michael Shaw, the brothers Charlie and Harry Manns, Jack Lloyd and probably a score of others at the time.

To complete the list, there is also recorded a "Tom Williams"! But try as I might, I cannot feel any "bushranging blood" coursing through my veins!

Incidentally, Andrew George Scott (Captain Moonlite)—known to most of the bushranging fraternity as "Preacher" Scott—was a very flamboyant but devout Anglican curate in and around Bacchus Marsh (Vic.) in the late 1870's of last century. He had fought in the Maori War during his residence in New Zealand, before coming to this country to become "a preacher and in search of gold in his spare time." He became most active in public life and, as a civil engineer by profession, he became a kind of "unpaid adviser" on various engineering projects throughout the area.

But masked and carrying pistols, he was an entirely different person, holding up gold escorts, various station-property homesteads, and even killing when the need arose. He finally ended up on the gallows with one of his companions in crime (Tom Rogan), on 20 January 1880, for the crime principally of shooting and killing Constable Bowen a few months earlier.

Truly was it said of our bushrangers, at the time, that they comprised a motley group of humanity. The press of those days never lost an opportunity of "playing up" to them! They featured every hold-up, shooting, murder, rape charge and capture—in fact, anything that provided news for an avid, even if scared, public.

"FEARLESS CITIZENS"

Many of the more-renowned offenders were portrayed as "dauntless, fearless citizens." In cartoons, they were featured in action, often with the effect of ridiculing the police troopers, black-trackers, station hands and even owners of properties, who joined in the hunt for the wanted criminals, whether called upon for help or not! But the bushrangers—most of them steeped in bush lore and cunning—were too wily and often led police and civilians into unsuspecting death-traps.

Not a few of the more-notorious of the bushranging cliques were wont to brag of their deeds. A case in point is that of Fred Lowry, wanted for his part in the hold-up of the Mudgee mail coach in 1863. Run to earth and shot down, he called out to his escaping mates: "Tell 'em I died game!" At other times, there were displayed extreme measures of loyalty and a sense of decency by many. It is on record that Matt. Brady deplored violence and unnecessary cruelty in handling those captured. He was most courteous where women were concerned in various hold-ups and on one noted occasion he personally disarmed and thrashed a fellow bush-ranger — a man named Curran — who had raped a young woman during a hold-up of a station property in the Goulburn district.

What appeared to be most outstanding among them, however, was their boldness and intense hatred of the police force in both Victoria and New South Wales. Their utter disregard of probable capture and subsequent hanging (or perhaps at the best imprisonment for life) never seemed to be a source of worry to them. On one occasion, "Mad Dan" Morgan attended a Christmas race-meeting at Wagga Wagga, mingled freely with the crowd (which included police and the district police magistrate and local dignitaries), made bets, "shouted" all and sundry to drinks at the bar and had what he termed afterwards "a rip-roaring day"! On another occasion he attended a Sunday School picnic, dispensed sweets and fruit among the children, judged sporting events and made himself both useful and popular—under the very eyes of the local Sergeant of Police. Such was their defiance of the law.

The noted Ben Hall was inclined to behave this way at times, also. He was the outlaw whom Ned Kelly said was the pick of them all and for whom he had the greatest admiration at all times. They both at different times captured towns in the southern areas of New South Wales and stripped the local police of their uniforms—and their pride in the bargain, no doubt! One of these centres was Jerilderie

and after looting the local bank—this was in 1879—Ben Hall and Joe Byrne galloped down the main street ahead of the others, including Morgan, shouting at the top of their voices: "Hurrah for the good old days of Morgan, Byrne and Ben Hall."

BEN HALL "THE GREATEST"

Various writers acclaim Ben Hall as perhaps the greatest of them all, and he came into the bushranging "field" not out of any choice on his part. He owned a small grazing property, led a peaceful life, had a very pretty young wife and a son, Harry, the "apple of his father's eye," as Hall often referred to him as being. He was arrested on a charge of being an associate of bushranger "Darkie" (Frank) Gardiner, in a hold-up near Forbes one night. He was held in prison for over a month and then discharged on the grounds of "insufficient evidence." During his absence, his wife cleared out with one of the arresting troopers (Constable Taylor), his son with them. All the station buildings were burned down—by police troopers, neighbours said—and his cattle stolen or let loose.

Whatever the reason, Ben Hall did not wait to learn any more. He located Gardiner and set out there and then on a wild life as a bushranger with a vengeance. For three whole years he carried out his purpose of seeking revenge, police troopers being his main objective, and his humiliation of them at all times was carried out with the greatest of contempt.

On one occasion, outside the town of Carcoar, he captured three of them, handcuffed them with their own handcuffs to trees, stole their pistols and used each of them in turn as targets for his marksmanship. Even their uniforms were taken and worn for many raids afterwards by Hall and his followers.

All these and subsequent happenings caused much concern in political circles, with bigger increases in rewards being offered for the apprehension of these "flagrant lawbreakers." It caused the British *Felons' Apprehension Act* to be brought into force, against Hall, Gilbert and Dunn in particular, calling on them to surrender themselves to the head jailer at Goulburn on or before 29 April 1861, or become outlawed instead. This Act meant that they could be shot on sight, with no questions asked, and a cash reward of £1,000 paid for each of the three men.

Hall was betrayed by a former accomplice on the outskirts of Forbes, surrounded, and shot down by police. In his dying moments he called out to one of his fleeing partners: "Don't

let them take me! Shoot me and shoot me dead, Billy!" But the police did that instead and no fewer than fifteen bullets were found in his body afterwards, together with over £70 in his pockets. He was buried in the Forbes cemetery and to this day his grave is well kept; the old crumbling wooden fence in recent years has ben replaced with a substantial concrete one, with an elaborate headstone.

Local opinion is that the son Harry—once the apple of his father's eye — has been responsible for this and the upkeep of this well-kept grave over the years.

Such was the short-lived life of the gamest of all the Australian bushrangers—Ben Hall.

"FLASH" DRESSERS

Strange as it might seem to us at this distance of Time, many of these men were highly intelligent to a degree, eloquent in speech and even witty. The majority of them liked to dress "flashily" and even the notorious Ned Kelly, the night before his hanging for the known murder of three policemen at Benalla in 1877—among other deeds, proven or otherwise—wanted to appear "at his best" in the eyes of the world, taking considerable pains with his final toilet in his cell, before posing for his final photograph in life.

Some, of course, were more notorious in other directions, sometimes bordering on the extremes in personal habits. For example, Pierce and Jeffries were actual cannibals, each babbling away while on the scaffold at the rear of the Hobart gaol in 1824, that "man's flesh was really most delicious." They had tasted of it often, when callously murdering fellow-prisoners at various times.

"Mad Dan" Morgan, the Riverina murderer and arsonist, and Andrew George Scott, the previously mentioned "Capt. Moonlite," were certainly "pyromaniacs." The Clarke Bros. committed murders of a particularly brutal nature, while the half-caste brothers, Jimmy and Jacky Governor, of Breelong, were slayers of the worst type. It can be said of "Mad Dan" Morgan that at most times he really considered the comforts of the women he encountered from time to time, on various station properties that the gang had held up, even though through one of them he was finally betrayed and found his way to the gallows.

Most of them, history records, held no illusions regarding the ultimate end in sight for their break with constitutional law and order and society as a whole. They all held the views of one of their number, Steve Hart, when he left to join forces with Ned Kelly and his gang:

"Here's to a short life and a merry one," he said. And a short and merry one it proved to be for many of them, too.

True, there were those great and intoxicating hours of pleasure and satisfaction in carrying out the great hold-ups at Euroa and Jerilderie, or when heading on fast, stolen horses for the Weddin, Wombat and Strathbogie ranges, to hide out "in smoke" for a time, when fleeing post-haste from mounted troopers, following both lightning and long-planned raids on banks or mail-coaches. But it was all a short and merry life in the long run for most of them.

Of the more-famous names reposing on the bushranger's calendar of the early and mid 60's and 70's of last century, only Power, Cash and Gardiner lived beyond middle age, even after their release from prison. And of all the long list, Cash has the distinction of being the only one who died in his own bed. This was on his own apple orchard outside Hobart, as a former "head" of Cash and Co., then regarded as one of the most successful in Van Dieman's Land (now Tasmania) in the 1840's. Later on, he actually became caretaker of the Hobart Botanical Gardens, marrying a former convict's widow and was buried with great dignity, his tombstone carrying the inscription, dated 26 August 1874: "He was a brave but unfortunate Irishman."

Strangely enough, few full-blooded aborigines took to the life as bushrangers, despite the fact that they were superb bushmen and probably had many opportunities of becoming outlaws and would prove hard to follow and become captured. They seemed to lack the urge to venture forth as such.

The nearest approach to aboriginal lawbreakers were the half-castes Jimmy and Joey Governor, of Breelong (New South Wales), who with a full-blood mate, Jacky Underwood, took on a fencing contract from a local farmer, with whom they quarrelled over payment rates. Jimmy Governor had married a white girl, but she was shunned by others in the camp and nearby area. This led to a bitter quarrel, ending in the massacre of no fewer than nine whites, including a 70-year-old man; the weapons used were tomahawks and long-handled axes.

The hunt for them, dead or alive, was most intense. They walked fences, railway lines, waded streams and used the skin of rabbits killed for food as protection for their feet, to hide their tracks. At one time, soldiers, over 200 policemen and nearly 1,000 civilians joined in the hunt for the criminals. They were finally captured while asleep in a secluded part of thick bush country. Jimmy Governor was literally riddled with bullets, Jacky Underwood, who was lame in one leg and had only one eye, was shot dead. Only

Joey Governor escaped, and he eventually was shot by a farmer-selector named Jack Wilkinson, somewhere in the region of Singleton.

A doctor's examination of the bodies showed no fewer than 50 bullet holes in Jimmy Governor's body. But such was the calibre of these outlaws that he walked stiffly from his wounds, but proudly, to the gallows a few weeks later, at Darlinghurst Gaol (Sydney), on 18 January 1901!

"Thunderbolt" (Fred Ward) wandered far and wide, and there are many places where earlier-day settlers can remember him.

I have seen several of "Thunderbolt's" well-known hide-outs—in rock-strewn country along the New South Wales-Queensland border, out from Stanthorpe in particular. They were cleverly selected spots, commanding look-outs from all angles. One spot there to this day is known as "Thunderbolt's Rock." His end came near Uralla, in northern New South Wales, where the residents of the New England district have caused to be erected in the local cemetery a tombstone, bearing the inscription: "Erected by New England residents, to mark where lies 'Thunderbolt' (Fred. Ward)."

Ned Kelly has been credited all told with taking the lives of between 25 and 30 people—police troopers in the majority— though he was blamed for almost every crime in the calendar when at the height of his "fame." This number can therefore be regarded as greatly overstated, even though he must be looked upon as a figure to have been feared and reckoned with at all times.

As previously stated, he took a keen interest in what happened to gaol prisoners in particular. On one occasion, he revolted bitterly at the type of punishment meted out to prisoners of the convict type, which ranged from public floggings for the most trivial misdeeds to death on the prison's "triangle." Often the flesh of their backs was reduced to pulp or hanging in shreds from the shoulders to the buttocks, the result of the use of the prison lash, sometimes at the rate of 300 a week, and administered by prison warders!

Despite the fact that Ned Kelly himself was held responsible at one time in particular in his lawless career for the murder of at least three Victorian policemen, including a sergeant of the Force, and wounding a Superintendent of Police, for having captured two towns, robbed innumerable banks, and held up gold-escorts and became the terror of both the Victorian and New South Wales countryside for over two years—in what was then known and is still referred to as "The Kelly Country"—public sympathy was invariably on his side.

A petition was signed by over 60,000 people and presented to the then Governor of Victoria, asking that his death sentence be commuted to imprisonment for life, instead of one of hanging. But the appeal was of no avail. I have seen this document, also a letter written by Ned Kelly to the Victorian Police Department. It was shown to me by the late E. J. ("Ned") Hogan, when he was Home Secretary in the Victorian Government.

Ned Kelly was undoubtedly an outlaw of the first water, despite all that was done and said in his favour at the time. "I'm fearless, I'm free and I'm bold," he wrote from his death cell. He was barely 15 years old when first sent to prison for assault and robbery of a Chinese miner and less than a year later — in 1870 — he found himself again in Beechworth gaol, on a fresh assault charge.

In his youthful years alone, Ned Kelly was regarded in local circles as being "flashily dressed, a superb horseman, a crack rifle shot and more than a match in a brawl with much older and more-experienced men of the day and time." He became entirely contemptuous of the law, besides being unruly, defiant and always insisting on "equal rights and equal justice for all and sundry people." Such was the Ned Kelly of those days!

Following the unsuccessful petition containing the 60,000 signatures, public sympathy with the executed Ned Kelly remained at a height for several years afterward, resulting in the dismissal in less than a space of two years of no fewer than a dozen policemen he had "crossed swords with" from time to time in the past. A Victorian Commissioner of Police and several senior officers of the Force also were subsequently dismissed the service!

THE "BABY" BUSHRANGER

This talk would not be complete without mention of the "baby" of the bushranging days—Johnny Vane. He joined up with the Ben Hall gang in the early 1860's, a mere youth, but he was "as game as any of them."

He soon tired of the life, however, and finally gave himself up to the police. It was said he was lucky and wise in this respect, for he only escaped being either captured or shot on several occasions. His mates in the "gang" at the time offered no serious objection to his decision to surrender; they believed and considered him to be the very antithesis of the classic run of bushrangers of the day, whose motto was always "to fight, but never surrender."

Vane saved himself from the inevitable fate—the gallows —which befell his former companions so soon afterwards.

His strong point was the clever stealing of thoroughbred horses, along with Ben Hall, and in which he showed amazing skill and cool daring. At one time there was a rich reward of over £2,000 offered by both the Victorian and southern New South Wales police departments for his capture (his name figuring on the same crime-sheet as Ben Hall, Steve Hart and others). Unperturbed, the whole gang went on its merry way, from victory to victory.

It was during a hold-up at Canowindra that Johnny Vane had a chat with the local parish priest (Father McCarthy) and, taking his advice, he gave himself up to the local police there and then. But Vane was hardly free of the grip the police now had on him. He was charged with a long list of crimes, for which he was duly tried and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. He was released before the full term expired, returned to the Lachlan Valley area, married, became at last a law-abiding citizen and became the father of no fewer than thirteen children.

Some of these or their direct descendants lived in the area for many years and some are still alive there.

"SHOWDOWN" AT GLENROWAN

Harking back briefly to the final "showdown" staged by the Kelly gang at the Glenrowan Hotel, and in which the gang had congregated to make this last stand, it is interesting to record that the charred bodies of Dan Kelly and Steve Hart were dragged from the burning ruins of the Glenrowan Hotel and conveyed by friendly onlookers to McDonnell's tavern, across the railway line from the scene of the night's tragedy. A hearse and two elaborate coffins were ordered and arrived the following day from Wangaratta, the bodies in their coffins being taken to nearby Greta, heavily guarded by a large band of friends as mourners.

A bitter "wake" was held for both men at the home of Jack Lloyd, an uncle of Dan Kelly. The Victorian Government ordered an inquest, but the local police warned that this would not be wise or even possible, as over 200 people at Greta, 50 of whom were heavily armed, were guarding the bodies. The police advised that no action should be taken. "If we try to take the bodies for the purpose of holding an inquest, there is sure to be a fight and much bloodshed," they stated. No inquest was ever held.

As stated earlier in this talk, these eras of our bushranging days certainly proved a rich harvest for many Australian writers in particular—both then and since those hectic times —when depicting the life of the day and time. It proved also a "boon" to those with a poetic bent, with their Australian

ballads and bush poems, the latter including the "Wild Colonial Boy" (Jack Doolan), "Botany Bay," "Ben Hall," "Jacky Power," "The Overlanders," "The Squatter's Man," "The Old Bullock Dray" and many others.

Most of these are well known and are still being recited by the many lovers of Australian poetry and the many enthusiasts of Australia's wild days of long ago, around camp fires, in shearing sheds and elsewhere.

Such are some of the incidents associated with our bush-ranging days and something about the main "actors on the various scenes," as far back now as that period between the early 1840's to the late 1880's in particular.

The unlawful deeds of these men were carried out with a "cheeky kind of flambuoyancy" which attracted public thought and imagination.

It seems likely that the "Kelly legend" will remain with us for many long years to come. For years on end now, we have all heard the expressions: "Now, don't give me that Ned Kelly stuff!" "Ned Kelly was a gentleman compared to you!" Or even this one: "If Ned Kelly were alive today, even the police would pat him on the back and call him a gentleman!" Such has become fame in the view of some people.